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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

THE SITUATION IN NIGERIA

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
30 May 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Nigeria

1. Lt. Col. Gowon, head of the crumbling Northern-dominated federal government, has reacted noisily to Eastern regional governor Ojukwu's declaration of secession early today, but an all-out military confrontation is not necessarily imminent. In any event, the chances are that the East will be able to sustain its independence bid and that sooner or later other parts of the country will follow suit. The ultimate questions now are at what point the fragmentation of the country can be checked and how much violence there will be.

2. Gowon reacted immediately in a manner clearly intended to convey determination to make good on his oft-repeated pledges to use force if necessary to preserve Nigeria's integrity. Declaring the Eastern move "an act of rebellion which will be crushed," he ordered "general mobilization" and formally proclaimed an economic blockade of the Eastern region.

3. Inasmuch as there are no organized reserves, federal mobilization cannot amount to much more than the ordered reenlistment of able-bodied veterans. Ground strength in the federal army is about 9,000, with five infantry battalions and two armored reconnaissance squadrons. Most federal army personnel are Northerners. Opposing this are some 5,000 Eastern troops [redacted] also divided probably into five battalions. With excellent inner lines of communications and good defensive positions, the East can probably successfully withstand any direct federal attack.

NOTE: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of Research and Reports.

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4. Because federal officers are aware of the difficulties of mounting an attack on the East, it is unlikely Gowon would order up an immediate frontal assault. More likely, an attempt would be made to enforce the now proclaimed economic blockade. Inasmuch as trade overland with the rest of Nigeria has been at a standstill for several months, Gowon can be expected to try to blockade the East's three ports--Port Harcourt, Calabar and Bonny. With only one DE-type ship and three patrol boats, however, a blockade would be difficult to enforce. Moreover, the major oil companies can be expected to pressure Gowon directly or through their own governments to permit oil exports from the East through any blockade.

5. In addition to the blockade, Gowon may be planning to send small armed units into the Eastern minority tribal areas to help stir up and support guerrilla activity against the Eastern Ibo government. The minority tribes have long been restive under Ibo domination. Although Ojukwu is well aware of this and has stationed three of his five battalions in minority areas, any such guerrilla activity would probably be difficult to suppress. Should it materialize, it might lead eventually to an all-out military confrontation between federal and Eastern forces.

6. The long-term economic prospects for the newly proclaimed "Republic of Biafra" are fairly good and considerably better than many already independent African nations as long as it can sell its oil. Oil is the chief export and source of government revenue, and it is likely the international oil companies will decide to deal with the new country once its survival appears assured.

7. International recognition will pose a problem for Ojukwu over the short term. African states, only too well aware of their own tribal problems, will not be quick to accept the break up of Nigeria along tribal lines. Nevertheless, the leaders of at least two countries--Zambia and Tanzania--have in recent months appeared decidedly more sympathetic to Ojukwu's regime than to Gowon's. In any event, the longer "Biafra" survives the better the chances will be that recognition will be forthcoming.

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8. The prospects for total disintegration in Nigeria and the eventual outbreak of widespread tribal warfare have been enhanced. If Gowon fails to move decisively enough to satisfy rabidly anti-Ibo Northern military officers they may take matters into their own hands. In the Western Region, where the security situation is extremely fragile, Yoruba tribesmen might take direct action to back up their demands for the removal of all federal troops of Northern origin. The Yoruba leader, Chief Awolowo, has said that the West would have to secede if the East did, but he may try initially to reach a modus vivendi with the Northerners.

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